

VZCZCXRO5407
RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDBU RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA
RUEHLN RUEHLZ RUEHNP RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHSK #0160/01 1351228
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 151228Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0268
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHSK/AMEMBASSY MINSK 0272

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000160

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: BELARUS WEEKLY POL/ECON REPORT - MAY 15, 2009

MINSK 00000160 001.2 OF 002

11. The following are brief items of interest compiled by
Embassy Minsk.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Civil Society

- Young Social Democrats Denied Registration (para. 2)
- Police Curb Opposition Demonstration (para. 3)
- Military Court Dismisses Forced Conscription Appeal (para. 4)
- Police to Investigate Vandalism Attack (para. 5)
- Malady Front Activists Fined (para. 6)

Domestic Economy

- IMF: Crisis Hit Belarus Harder Than Expected (para. 7)
- GOB Pleased with Results of Eastern Partnership Summit (para. 8)

Foreign Trade

- Lukashenka Vows Not to Cut Potassium Fertilizers Prices (para. 9)
- Gazprom Agrees on More Flexible Price Policy for Belarus (para. 10)

Quote of the Week (para. 11)

Civil Society

12. Young Social Democrats Denied Registration

The Justice Ministry denied May 11 registration to the NGO Young Social Democrats-Young Gramada. The Ministry alleged that NGO's charter contained "errors," and its declared goals conflicted with enforced legal provisions. The NGO's founders stated that the denial was groundless and Ministry's approach "biased."

13. Police Curb Opposition Demonstrations

On May 7, riot police dispersed a protest staged by opposition activists to mark the 10th anniversary of the disappearance of former Interior Minister and opposition leader Yuriy Zakharenko.

Approximately 30 activists were detained, questioned, fingerprinted and released later without charge. Human rights portals reported that some demonstrators were beaten in police vehicles and at the precinct. Police briefly apprehended Anatoliy Lebedko, United Civic Party Chairperson, and four associates ahead of the demonstration, impeding their participation.

Riot police stifled another opposition youth independence march in downtown Minsk on May 16. Officers encircled and prevented several dozen Malady Front and European Belarus opposition youth from demonstrating when they unfolded banners and outlawed flags. No arrests were reported; however, a number of activists were reportedly detained before the event in Minsk and in the regions as they prepared to come to the demonstration. European Belarus activist Maksim Vinyarskiy told the press that police assaulted him while in transport to a precinct for questioning.

14. Military Court Dismisses Forced Conscription Appeal

Belarus' Military Court dismissed May 12 an appeal filed by Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) youth group leader Franak Vyachorka to challenge his forced conscription in January 2009. The activist will now appeal to the Chairman of the Military Court to reconsider the verdict. Vyachorka's father, Vintsuk, Deputy Chairman of the BPF, argued that the Court did not examine the appeal "fully and thoroughly."

15. Police to Investigate Vandalism Attack

A Brest district police precinct opened May 12 a criminal case to investigate a May 9 vandalism attack on a Jewish ghetto memorial. A local Jewish community leader reported that activists discovered May 10 that the memorial was blackened by smoke from burnt wreaths and flowers laid at the monument on Victory Day. The "insulting" incident was at least the ninth attack on the memorial in recent years.

In a separate incident at a Jewish cemetery May 13, vandals sprayed black paint and drew swastikas on four monuments dedicated to German Jews killed by Nazis on the territory of Belarus. The paint was immediately removed by municipal cleaning services, and the community reported the incident to the police.

MINSK 00000160 002.2 OF 002

16. Malady Front Activists Fined

On May 14, a Minsk district court fined Malady Front (MF) leader Pavel Kuryanovich \$125 for violating regulations governing mass events. Police arrested Kuryanovich in Minsk on May 12 as he was distributing opposition leaflets. In a separate case on May 12, a Soligorsk district court fined MF members Kristina Samoilova, Gleb Snorkin and Iliya Nagorniy \$250, \$125 and \$185, respectively. The three were given administrative charges for unfolding a poster saying "School For All" on May 5, urging equal education opportunities for all students, and protesting expulsions of opposition activists.

Domestic Economy

17. IMF: Crisis Hit Belarus Harder Than Expected

An IMF mission led by Chris Jarvis issued a statement May 12, publicizing the results of the first review of Belarus' Stand-By Arrangement loan of USD 2.46 billion. After a 2-week stay in Minsk, the Mission found that the global economic crisis had hit Belarus much more severely than originally expected. Jarvis said that he expects to continue soon discussions over how to address problems caused by the global financial crisis.

18. GOB Pleased With Results of Eastern Partnership Summit

According to the Foreign Ministry's press service, the Belarusian delegation at the Eastern Partnership (EP) summit in Prague presented May 7 investment projects which the GOB would like to see undertaken in Belarus under the EP program. The GOB seeks to develop the country's infrastructure, conserve energy, and streamline customs and border control procedures with the EU. The delegation led by Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir

Semashko also met with EU senior officials Javier Solana and Benita Ferrero-Waldner to exchange signed copies of a declaration on energy cooperation between the GOB and the European Commission. Answering journalists questions May 8, Lukashenka said he was pleased with the EP summit's results and noted that free trade with the EU is of primary interest to Belarus.

Foreign Trade

9. Lukashenka Vows Not to Cut Potassium Fertilizer Prices

According to the presidential press service, during a visit to Belaruskaly, one of the world's largest manufacturers of potassium fertilizers, Lukashenka stated May 8 that he will not allow Belarusian-made fertilizers to be sold cheaply. He said, "We need to explain to our customers in India, China and other countries that we will not cut prices~We need a fair price so we can make a profit." He also warned the company's top managers against any concessions or discounts to customers, claiming it is the policy of international customers to wait and see if Belarus will sell anything at a loss. Lukashenka said, "This is not going to happen."

10. Gazprom Agrees on More Flexible Price Policy for Belarus

Economic counselor of the Russian Embassy in Belarus Andrei Kuznetsov told Prime-TASS news agency May 13 that Russia's Gazprom company has agreed to waive the 7 percent corridor provision for the Belarusian natural gas price. The waiver, requested by the GOB, will apply to all Belarus-bound gas supplies until the long-term contract expires in 2011. According to Kuznetsov, the move will benefit Belarus as long as world oil prices remain low as the contract makes natural gas prices fluctuate in accordance with world oil and oil products prices. Neither Belarusian nor Russian sides have yet officially announced the natural gas price for Belarus in 2009.

Quote of the Week

11. In response to a reporter's question May 8, Lukashenka denied rumors that Belarus is turning its back on Russia:

"We are not distancing ourselves from Russia. We are ready to cooperate with this country as closely as they are ready to ~ Who failed to comply with provisions of the Union State agreement? The Russian side did~We simply want to have good and stable relations with our Western neighbors. In the South, we don't have any problems with Ukraine. In the East, we have problems with Russia but they are few. And we will definitely normalize our relations with the West."

MILLER